

IN THE CLAIMS:

Please amend the claims as follows:

1. (Original) Database query set-up unit for combining a set of search criteria in order to set up a database query, **characterized by**
a contribution stack (1) for storing search criteria provided by at least one user or by the system itself in the order of occurrence, whereby each new search criterion provided by said at least one user or by the system is pushed onto said contribution stack (1), and
means (7, 9, 11) for deriving a current information state (8, 10, 12) from said contribution stack (1), whereby said current information state is formed from a subset of the set of search criteria contained in said contribution stack (1), and whereby said current information state (8, 10, 12) is used for accessing a database.
2. (Original) Database query set-up unit according to claim 1, **characterized in that** the order in which said search criteria are provided by said at least one user or by the system determines a hierarchy of dependencies between said search criteria.
3. (Currently Amended) Database query set-up unit according to claim 1 ~~or 2~~,
characterized in that each time a new search criterion is provided, it is checked whether said new search criterion refers to an attribute that has already been specified by an earlier search criterion stored in said contribution stack.
4. (Original) Database query set-up unit according to claim 3, **characterized in that**, in case said new search criterion refers to an attribute that has already been specified by an earlier search criterion stored in said contribution stack, said earlier search criterion is erased from said contribution stack, and said new search criterion is pushed onto said contribution stack.

5. (Original) Database query set-up unit according to claim 3, **characterized in that**, in case said new search criterion refers to an attribute that has already been specified by an earlier search criterion stored in said contribution stack, said earlier search criterion and all search criteria that have been pushed onto the contribution stack afterwards are popped from said contribution stack, and said new search criterion is pushed onto said contribution stack.
6. (Currently Amended) Database query set-up unit according to ~~anyone of the preceding claims~~ claim 1, **characterized by** means for relaxing the search constraints of a database query which suppress at least one of said set of search criteria contained in said contribution stack when said current information state is derived.
7. (Original) Database query set-up unit according to claim 6, **characterized in that** said means for relaxing the search constraints of a database query select the search criteria to be suppressed according to the order of occurrence, and/or according to user profiles, and/or according to context information.
8. (Currently Amended) Database query set-up unit according to claim 6 ~~or 7~~, **characterized in that** at least the most recent search criterion stored in said contribution stack is suppressed when said current information state is derived.
9. (Currently Amended) Database query set-up unit according to claim 6 ~~or 7~~, **characterized in that** at least the oldest search criterion stored in said contribution stack is suppressed when said current information state is derived.
10. (Currently Amended) Database query set-up unit according to ~~anyone of claims 6 to 9~~ claim 6, **characterized in that** search criteria that are suppressed when said current information state is derived are erased from said contribution stack.

11. (Currently Amended) Database query set-up unit according to ~~anyone of claims 6 to 9~~ claim 6, **characterized in that** search criteria that are suppressed when said current information state is derived are only erased from said contribution stack when it turns out that the query yields a acceptable result
12. (Currently Amended) Database query set-up unit according to ~~anyone of claims 6 to 9~~ claim 6, **characterized in that** search criteria that are suppressed when said current information state is derived are maintained within said contribution stack.
13. (Currently Amended) Database query set-up unit according to ~~anyone of the preceding claims~~ claim 1, **characterized in that** said search criteria are obtained by means of an interactive system based on an artificial language, preferably based on a database query language.
14. (Currently Amended) Database query set-up unit according to ~~anyone of claims 1 to 12~~ claim 1, **characterized in that** said search criteria are obtained from said at least one user by means of a natural language dialogue system.
15. (Original) Method for setting up database queries by combining a set of search criteria, **characterized by** the following steps:
- pushing search criteria provided by at least one user or by the system itself onto a contribution stack (1) in the order of occurrence,
 - deriving a current information state (8, 10, 12) from said contribution stack (1), whereby said current information state (8, 10, 12) is formed from a subset of the set of search criteria contained in said contribution stack (1),
 - setting up a database query corresponding to said current information state (8, 10, 12).

16. (Original) Method according to claim 15, **characterized in that** the order in which said search criteria are provided by said at least one user or by the system determines a hierarchy of dependencies between said search criteria.
17. (Currently Amended) Method according to claim 15 ~~or claim 16~~, further **characterized by** each time a new search criterion is provided, checking whether said new search criterion refers to an attribute that has already been specified by an earlier search criterion stored in said contribution stack.
18. (Original) Method according to claim 17, **characterized by** erasing said earlier search criterion from said contribution stack, and pushing said new search criterion onto said contribution stack in case said new search criterion refers to an attribute that has already been specified by an earlier search criterion stored in said contribution stack.
19. (Original) Method according to claim 17, **characterized by** popping said earlier search criterion and all search criteria that have been pushed onto the contribution stack afterwards from said contribution stack, and pushing said new search criterion onto said contribution stack in case said new search criterion refers to an attribute that has already been specified by an earlier search criterion stored in said contribution stack.
20. (Currently Amended) Method according to ~~any of claims 15 to 19~~ claim 15, **characterized by** a step of relaxing the search constraints of a database query by suppressing at least one of said set of search criteria contained in said contribution stack when said current information state is derived.
21. (Original) Method according to claim 20, **characterized by** a step of selecting the search criteria to be suppressed according to the order of occurrence, and/or according to context information, and/or according to user profiles.

22. (Currently Amended) Method according to claim 20 ~~or 21~~, **characterized by** a step of suppressing at least the most recent search criterion stored in said contribution stack when said current information state is derived.
23. (Currently Amended) Method according to claim 20 ~~or 21~~, **characterized by** a step of suppressing at least the oldest search criterion stored in said contribution stack when said current information state is derived.
24. (Currently Amended) Method according to ~~anyone of claims 20 to 23~~ claim 20, **characterized by** a step of erasing those search criteria from said contribution stack that have been suppressed when said current information state is derived.
25. (Currently Amended) Method according to ~~anyone of claims 20 to 23~~ claim 20, **characterized by** a step of maintaining those search criteria within said contribution stack that have been suppressed when said current information state is derived.
26. (Currently Amended) Method according to ~~anyone of claims 15 to 25~~ claim 15, **characterized by** a step of obtaining said search criteria by means of an interactive system based on an artificial language, preferably based on a database query language.
27. (Currently Amended) Method according to ~~anyone of claims 15 to 25~~ claim 15, **characterized by** a step of obtaining said search criteria from said at least one user by means of a natural language dialogue system.

28. (Currently Amended) Computer program product, comprising computer program means adapted to embody the features of the database query set-up unit as defined in ~~anyone of claims 1 to 14~~ claim 1 ~~or to perform the method steps as defined in anyone of claims 15 to 27~~ when said computer program product is executed on a ~~computer~~, digital signal processor, ~~or the like~~.

29. (New) Computer program product, comprising computer program means adapted to perform the method steps as defined in claim 15 when said computer program product is executed on a digital signal processor.